

Energy law pulls plug on Edison's light bulb



An Edison electric light bulb

(2007-12-19)

KUER News

Reuters, By Tom Doggett

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The light bulb Thomas Edison invented 125 years ago is getting more than a make-over. The government is pulling the plug on it.

The landmark energy bill President George W. Bush signed into law on Wednesday will require lighting to use up to 30 percent less energy, which will basically phase out the traditional light bulb because it won't be able to meet the new efficiency standards.

Almost 90 percent of the energy used by today's incandescent bulbs produces heat and only 10 percent goes to giving off light.

Ready to replace them are more energy-efficient fluorescent and halogen bulbs, which cost more (about \$8 for a package of 6), but last up to 10 times longer and save consumers money on their electric bills.

The bulbs also aren't as hot to the touch, as most of the energy they consume is turned into light.

When the 4 billion light sockets in the United States eventually make the switch-over, the efficiency standards will lower household utility bills by more than \$18 billion a year.

"Consumers will save money in their pockets," said Randy Moorhead, vice president for government affairs at Philips Electronics, a major bulb maker.

The efficient bulbs will also save enough electricity to have powered all the homes in Texas last year, and they will prevent 100 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions at power plants, according to the Alliance to Save Energy.

"We're committed to money-saving, energy-saving products (that) help save the planet," bulb maker Sylvania said in a statement.

The incandescent bulb won't become a collector's item right away, however.

The higher efficiency requirements under the new energy law kick in for the 100-watt bulb beginning in 2012, followed by the 75-watt bulb a year later and then 40- and 60-watt bulbs will be phased out in 2014.

Australia, Ireland and other countries are already getting rid of the incandescent bulb.

About two dozen categories of light bulbs are exempt from the U.S. law's efficiency requirements, including oven and refrigerator bulbs, candelabra lamps, plant lights, replacement traffic signal bulbs and the summer necessity -- the yellow bulb that doesn't attract insects.

(Editing by Walter Bagley)

© Copyright 2007, Reuters